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ABSTRACT

The four-day school week is a Monday-Thursday or Tuesday-Friday alternative to the traditional four-day week, which can be implemented with many variables and differing objectives. The four-day week saves heating, transportation, maintenance, electricity and some instructional costs, while providing better educational opportunities and use of facilities. It has proven popular with students, teachers and communities in the 12 Colorado school districts and 20 colleges which have tried it. Only a few minor negative aspects have been reported. (Author/JW)

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FOUR DAY SCHOOL WEEK FOR SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

Small Schools Fact Sheet

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools

July 1982

FOUR DAY SCHOOL WEEK FOR SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

What is the 4-day school week?

The 4-day school week is a Monday-Thursday or Tuesday-Friday alternative to the traditional 4-day week, which can be implemented with many variables and differing objectives. The 4-day week saves heating, transportation, maintenance, electricity and some instructional costs, while providing better educational opportunities and use of facilities. It has proven popular with students, teachers and the communities in the school districts and colleges which have tried it. Most schools using the 4-day week changed to a 7.5-hour instructional day for 144 days over 36 weeks to meet state requirements of 1,080 hours per school year. The typical day begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m. A few districts modify their schedules in the winter months to allow for the shorter daylight hours and extend their school year to 155 days. Others alternate closing Monday or Friday to accommodate seasonal activities. Most schools drop Friday, but do plan some extra-curricular activities for this time so students lost no academic time during the instructional week. Because many national holidays are celebrated on Monday, some school districts hold classes Tuesday through Friday so they have warm buildings for Friday sporting events, then turn down the thermostats for three full days.

What have been the effects on student achievement?

Preliminary assessments of achievement scores compared with those of previous years demonstrate that achievement is at least comparable. There is no reason to suspect that the shorter week hinders students.

What savings are possible?

Statistics from 12 Colorado school districts seem to be representative. Heating fuel savings ranged from 7-25% depending on weather conditions, condition of buildings, and the day closed; those closing Mondays showed greater reductions in fuel consumption. Costs for gasoline for buses decreased 20-25%; gas costs decreased by 20% for students, teachers and others who provided their own transportation. School bus and vehicle maintenance costs decreased 18%, and electricity costs 23%. The 4-day week is presently being used mainly by schools paying a flat rate for water, so no financial savings resulted, but 25% less water usage was registered by those having meters.

Reduced teacher absences accounted for an average savings of 24.5 substitute teacher days. As secretarial and custodial hours were not cut, only scheduled differently, no cost benefits occured in these areas. Superintendents did note the fact that because much maintenance could be done on the closed day, much less would need to be done in the summer. Cafeteria personnel usually were paid the same, because most of schools provided some sort of breakfast or snack break to aid in concentration. A breakfast break seemed to be the most popular nutritionally, educationally and monetarily as the students felt good, and in Colorado the state reimburses the district for breakfasts.

What are teachers' reactions to the 4-day week?

An overwhelming majority of teachers (94.7% in Colorado) in all schools at all levels endorsed the program, although many suggested some modifications. Nearly all listed enjoying extra time with their families and taking care of personal business and shopping as the main reasons for their preference. Approximately 50% spent the day working on instructional materials or attending professional meetings.

Secondary teachers indicated the longer class periods increased the efficiency of instruction, especially for classes in shop, business, home economics, science, art, and physical education, where increased "time on task" helps students accomplish much more. The longer day modified secondary teaching methods primarily by giving time in class for assistance with homework and by expecting more in-depth assignments to be done over the long weekend. Physical education students at some schools showed 25% more improvement on the President's Physical Fitness Plan than the year before. Most school districts utilizing the Monday through Thursday schedule did not program any extra-curricular events for those days, which saved 4.1 school days for each student. Coaches held differing viewpoints depending on the sport, age group and the day dropped. Schools with Friday off said their players were more rested and mentally alert for competition in games scheduled on Fridays. Teachers in the Tuesday-Friday schools commented that problems with extra-curricular activities interrupting classes still continued. Coaches at these schools especially said the long day, no practice on Monday or using a cold gymnasuim, might cause greater fatigue and a loss of skill and conditioning, particularly for young players. Most of the secondary teachers preferring a 5-day week had low-achieving students. About half of these stated their students needed the extra day for repetition rather than a longer time span.

Most of the 94% of the elementary teachers favoring the short week in Colorado adjusted their methods and schedules by intensively teaching the rigorous subjects in the morning and then rotating every 30-45 minutes for art, music, and so on in the afternoon with no loss of effectiveness. Many teachers believe they are more productive because the students are happy with the extra day off, are more rested, and look forward to coming back.

What are parent reactions?

Ninety-one percent of the Colorado parents contacted desired continuance of the short week including the small group with two working parents in spite of some drawbacks. Scheduling of medical appointments was the most frequently mentioned advantage; leisure and value-learning family activities, better attitudes toward school, and less time spent riding the bus were also considered important. Most of the negative attitudes concerned excessive tiredness for elementary children riding the bus. Farm and ranch parents missed help with chores. Working parents commented that the family was often cranky with one another because of being tired, that a baby sitter was needed, and that children had little to do on their day off and had to be driven to school on Friday if extra-curricular activities were scheduled. Others questioned whether the educational time was really equivalent.

What are the students' reactions?

By interviewing K-3 and surveying 4th-11th graders, reactions collected from 85% of the 1,474 Colorado students showed that 93% wanted to keep the 4-day week, with high schoolers the most favorable. Reasons given were that they learned more, had fewer absences, and had a feeling that school was better this year.

What do students do with their extra day?

About half of the 4th-8th graders indicated they worked without pay; most of the remainder watched TV, "goofed around" or participated in sports. A slightly higher percentage of high school students worked without pay, and 36% were paid. Sports accounted for more time; "goofing around" was about the same as for the younger group, while TV watching occupied less time, but the difference seemed to be taken up with driving around. Reading, listening to music, hobbies, and studying took up the remainder.

What are the reactions of the community colleges using the program?

The overwhelmingly favorable response of the students, faculties and communities is probably partly due to the fact that each administration requested feedback on the proposed changes before they were implemented. Seven Texas colleges, nine Los Angeles community college campuses, Lake City, Florida, and Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake, Washington are among those using the "Fabulous Friday" schedule. Overall energy saving, improved campus morale, equal quality education and increases in part-time enrollments contributed to favorable attitudes. Working students find it easier to allocate their time, overall absenteeism is reduced, instructors lost less class time when attending conferences, and students can attend weekend seminars. Scheduling and adjusting to 90-minute Monday and Wednesday classes went smoothly in most cases, as Tuesday and Thursday classes have been 90 minutes long for years.

What are the future possibilities of the 4-day week?

The number of schools that will find changing their calendars advantageous depends to a great extent on energy costs in the future, the location and condition of each school and the number of families with two working parents. Rural, and northern schools and especially community colleges appear to benefit the most. As several educators have pointed out, the 4-day week could be just another fad that does not live up to its potential if no other innovative activities result from the extra day.

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